

Honorah O'Neill  
54 Taylor Ave.  
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February 18th, 2020

Committee on Children  
Legislative Office Building, room 011  
300 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

This is in regards to bill S.B. No. 89 regarding school lunch debt.

As a former school lunch lady, hungry kids can't learn. It's really that simple. Feed that kid. It is the simplest and most cost effective investment in education you can make. You can hire all the best teachers, spend loads on special programs, and it's all undone by something as simple as "this child is too hungry to learn." It's a lost day of learning. It's a lost day of growth. Piled up over years, it makes a huge difference.

No child should be denied food due to a lunch debt. Nor should not be required to swap to a different, inferior lunch because of it either. The main meal each day on the school lunch menu really is designed to provide the appropriate amount of nutrients and calories for that age. (a la carte items are a different story, but the main meal really is supposed to provide 1/3rd of kid's nutrition for the day!)

Banning the practice of denying kids meals over lunch debt is the absolute minimum you should do. The absolute, bare minimum. You really SHOULD just make school lunch free and look at integrating in free breakfast wherever possible. It's the best return on investment for education.

Aside from the monetary impact on poor families, and improving the physical well being of children, it provides a psychological safety net to the most at-risk kids. They don't have to devote any emotional or mental energy to figuring out what they'll eat today, IF they'll eat today at all. That is a terrible ongoing burden for anyone, especially a child. Remove that burden and that frees up space to learn.

Sincerely,  
Honorah O'Neill